

3. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

»Exit Options«: Crises and Scope of Imperial Power

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Questionnaire

For the purposes of our project we understand »empire« to be a multi-ethnic power sphere in which a core society effectively, though not necessarily formally, exercises almost exclusive control over several geographically distinct peripheral societies. In this regard we focus on world powers that were capable of decisively projecting their power both within and beyond their imperial borders.

We understand »imperial crises of power« to be fundamental challenges to the empire's projection of power, its structure, and even placing the empire's entire existence in question.

Session 1 Categories and Concepts

Introduction Claudia Weber

Chair Bernd Greiner

- * When and under what conditions are frictions encountered by the imperial exercise of power perceived as a crisis? Who has the power of defining vital imperial interests, the threat to which constitutes a crisis?
- * How does the perception of a crisis on the part of imperial elites differ from that of societies in the center and the periphery?
- * Wherein lie the differences between perception of a crisis by contemporaries and later historical ascriptions?
- * Who are the actors in a crisis, both in the center and the periphery? For what newly emergent actors does the crisis present an opportunity for change?

Session 2 Imperial Negotiation Processes

Introduction Dierk Walter

Chair Bernd Greiner

- * What role do »imperial projects« (in the sense of social-integration or identification offerings) play in an empire's ability to be resilient against or susceptible to crises?
- * In a crisis how do social-affiliation constructs (the perception of oneself and the other) to the empire change in both the center and the periphery?
- * To what degree do political renegotiations of »imperial projects« and of social-affiliation constructs determine the course and outcome of imperial crises? Who are the actors and who in fact profits from such negotiation processes?
- * Which emotional resources (for example religion) support the self-mobilization of social actors in such negotiation processes?
- * What are the conditions under which such processes create social dynamics that place into question a person's affiliation with the empire?

Session 3 Transformation of Political Power Praxis

Introduction Claudia Weber

Chair Dierk Walter

- * What options for political transformation do the actors have at their disposal?
- * Beyond merely reacting to crisis phenomena, do imperial elites seize upon the crisis as an opportunity for the transformation of imperial power?
- * To what extent is the transformation of the political exercise of power a balancing of the interests of essential and peripheral imperial positions?
- * As a result of having experienced losses, are imperial elites capable of developing the potential for long-term and effective self-correction?

Session 4 The Option of Force

Introduction Bernd Greiner

Chair Dierk Walter

- * When and under what conditions do imperial elites resort to force as a strategy for resolving a conflict?
- * When and under what conditions do peripheral social-political groups choose force as an option in imperial crises (for example separatist movements, social insurrection, terrorism)?
- * How do institutions and apparatuses of force behave in imperial crises, and what role is played by their earlier experience of crises?
- * When is the renunciation of force an option in imperial crises?

Suggested Reading

Alfred J. Rieber, Civil Wars in the Soviet Union. In: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. 4(2003),1; 129-162

Ronald Robinson. The Excentric Idea of Imperialism, with or without Empire. In: Wolfgang J. Mommsen, Jürgen Osterhammel (Eds.): *Imperialism and After. Continuities and Discontinuities*. London/Boston/Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986; 267-289

D. George Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire, 1775-1997*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999; 21-43

Xosé Manuel Núñez, Nation-Building and Regional Integration: The Case of the Spanish Empire (1700-1914). In: Stefan Berger/Alexei Miller (Eds.): *Empires and Regional Integration* (forthcoming)